

CLIMATE CHANGE?

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Is our climate changing, is it global warming? Is the earth warming more rapidly due to human activity with carbon emissions? The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) believes so. Other international scientists disagree, reporting that there is no consensus among climate scientists. Climate change and what we should be doing about it is being hotly (no pun intended) debated worldwide.

So what does this mean to us here in San Luis Obispo County?

The passage of AB 32 (California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006), combined with SB 375, requires local government to adopt a sustainable communities strategy. San Luis Obispo County adopted "Strategic Growth" policies into the County's General Plan over a year ago. In May of this year, the new Conservation and Open Space Element was adopted by the Board of Supervisors to address climate change and the state's legislation.

Now the county is working on their Climate Action Plan and has held two Climate Change Adaptation Stakeholder workshop/meetings in conjunction with the City of San Luis Obispo and assistance of the nonprofit Local Government Commission.

The foundation of the workshops is the hypothesis that there will be regional temperature, precipitation, vegetation, wildfire and sea level changes. The workshops focused on the following:

- Health and emergency preparedness
- Agriculture and related tourism
- Water supply and wastewater management
- Infrastructure/transportation and energy
- Coastal marine/coastal tourism.

Agriculturalists, including Farm Bureau members, have attended these meetings, both to give input and to make sure agriculture does not become the scapegoat for global warming.

As part of the foundation of these workshops, the "potential changes" in San Luis Obispo County are projected to be as follows:

- Increases in inland temperature
- Increasing droughts
- Increasing severity of storms/rainfall events, resulting in intense runoff and inland flooding
- Change in the number of fog days along the coast (potential for decrease or increase)
- Increase of areas burned annually by wildfires
- Increased risk of landslides due to increased occurrences of wildfires and intense rainfall events
- Sea-level rise along the coast, resulting in more coastal flooding and coastal erosion.

More specifically, the projected threats from climate change to agriculture were projected to be the following:

- Higher temperatures

- Reduced water availability
- More intense downpours, leading to fruit, vegetable and flower damage and increased risk of soil erosion
- Increased water demand by plants and animals (for drinking and cooling)
- Increased risk of pest infestations and spread of invasive plant species

Generally speaking, following break-out sessions at the second workshop, the more than 100 workshop participants developed four priorities for agriculture:

1. Conserve water
 - Include Best Management Practices
 - Develop new technologies
 - Use recycled water
2. Address greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration
 - Include local food production and purchasing
 - Develop policies and programs to encourage energy efficiency
 - Use forestry management, riparian management and tree planting
3. Provide tools and economic incentives to improve land use planning
 - Work with Cooperative Extension and Cal Poly
 - Preserve the Williamson Act Program
 - Develop land banks and conservation easement with new tools and flexibility
4. Address the social differences that lead to conflicts and housing shortages for farm and tourism workers
 - Provide on-site affordable housing
 - Offer education through various agencies and non-profits

Although many of us had other thoughts on the issues, the majority of the workshop participants voted that these were the main issues.

This leads me back full circle. Just a couple of months ago a Stanford study concluded that, in the end of the 20th and now into the 21st century, advances in intensive, high-yield agriculture is actually slowing the pace of global warming. Why? Because of less forest and grassland needing to be cleared to accommodate less efficient farming of prior generations. And, according to the study, the carbon savings are significant. So, how does this fit into the above Climate Action Plan?

Whether we believe there is global warming and that man is hastening global warming or not, our state and local government are well into the process of looking at how to reduce greenhouse gases and reverse (or slow) climate change. With this in mind, a number of us are following what is happening to assure that whatever policies or regulations are developed are not going to exact one more serious impact on those of us in farming and ranching, leading to our extinction.

Thought for the Day: *Is climate change a unique event caused or exacerbated by man or an ongoing and evolving earth process? Archeological evidence shows that 47 million years ago there was a tropical rainforest just south of what is now Frankfurt, Germany, where the fossilized remains of a primate named Ida were discovered.*